

NEW INVESTIGATORS | FAQ

GENERAL

What types of grants are available to New Investigators?

There are two types of grants available specifically to New Investigators:

- The first is a Standard Grant (i.e., New Investigator Standard Grant), which is a Standard Grant application in all respects except that the Project Director (PD) meets the eligibility criteria described below for New Investigators. These New Investigator Standard Grant applications are reviewed with all other Standard Grant applications submitted to the respective program area priority, with special consideration given by NIFA program staff to funding of New Investigator Standard Grant applications that fall below the funding line. In these cases, the New Investigator box must be checked under Food and Agriculture Science Enhancement (FASE) on the AFRI Project Type form. New Investigator Standard Grants should adhere to the maximum budget guidelines of the program area priority under which the application is being submitted.
- Individuals qualifying as New Investigators are eligible to apply for a Seed Grant regardless of institutional affiliation and eligibility for Strengthening Grants. Please see the [AFRI Project and Grant Types FAQ](#) for more information. An individual applicant may submit only one Seed Grant as PD during the current fiscal year. New Investigators also may only receive one New Investigator Seed Grant as PD during their career. New Investigator Seed Grant applications (i.e., Strengthening Seed Grant applications) will be reviewed with other Seed Grant applications submitted to the respective program area priority with special consideration given to funding of New Investigator Seed Grant applications. In these cases, the New Investigator Seed Grant box should be checked under FASE on the AFRI Project Type form. Seed Grants are limited to a total of \$300,000 (including indirect costs) for up to 2 years in duration and are not renewable.

How are New Investigator grants funded?

There are no set-aside funds for New Investigators.

- For New Investigator Standard Grants, general program funds can be used to fund a New Investigator application that was ranked meritorious by the peer panel but fell below the funding line cut-off in a particular AFRI program area priority. In such a case, the last ranked proposal above the funding cut-off (to a non-new investigator) is skipped over to support a New Investigator below the cut-off. The recommendation to fund a New Investigator application below the original funding line cut-off is made by the program staff and approved by the senior leadership. Generally, the more meritorious New Investigators above the funding line that are funded by a particular panel (e.g., applications from new investigators were meritorious and ranked above the funding line cut-off), the lower the

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likelihood of a New Investigator's application below the funding line being recommended for funding.

- In the case of New Investigator Seed Grants, all Seed Grant applications submitted to the respective program area priority will be reviewed together, with separate funding considerations given to Strengthening-eligible Seed Grant applications and New Investigator Seed Grant applications.

Is there any dedicated funding for New Investigator grants?

There are no dedicated funds for New Investigator standard grants, but each program area priority is expected to fund one or more New Investigator standard grants above or below the funding line each cycle. A philosophy of NIFA under the AFRI program is to provide meaningful support to New Investigators.

ELIGIBILITY

What is the eligibility to apply as a New Investigator?

A New Investigator is a lead project director of an application to an AFRI program area priority who is beginning their research career, does not have an extensive scientific publication record, and has less than five years of postgraduate, career-track experience. A limited publication record is considered less than 25 publications as first/senior author and less than 75 total publications. An individual who is beginning their research career and has less than five years of postgraduate, career-track experience, but does not exceed 12 years beyond completion of the doctoral or any other terminal degree is considered eligible. Postdoctoral experience does not count towards the first five years of career-track experience. The new investigator may not have received competitively awarded Federal research funds as Project Director (PD) except for the pre- or post-doctoral grants, equipment grants, education grants, extension grants, and AFRI Seed Grants. Federal funding received by the applicant as Co-PD of previously awarded competitive grants does not count against New Investigator eligibility. If a PD has received an AFRI seed grant, they may still be eligible to apply for a New Investigator Standard Grant. The PD does not have to be a U.S. citizen, but the application must be submitted through a U.S. institution.

What is the eligibility for strengthening grants for New Investigators (Seed grants and Strengthening Standard grants)?

Strengthening grants are limited to institutions that qualify as a 1) small and mid-sized or minority-serving institution that have had limited institutional success for receiving Federal funds or (2) State Agricultural Experiment Stations or degree-granting institutions eligible for USDA Established Program to Stimulate Competitive Research (EPSCoR) funding. Please see the [AFRI Project and Grant Types FAQ](#) for explanations of small and mid-sized institution, minority-serving institution, limited institutional success, and EPSCoR. A New Investigator from a Strengthening-eligible institution can have their application considered as both a New Investigator application and a Strengthening application.

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I qualify as a New Investigator and am also located at a strengthening-eligible institution described above. Can I submit two different seed grant applications to AFRI during the same fiscal year?

No, an applicant may only submit one seed grant application as PD to AFRI in a given fiscal year. However, if you are a New Investigator and are also at an institution eligible to submit strengthening grant applications, then your seed grant application will be considered as both a New Investigator application and a Strengthening application, which may increase the likelihood of it being funded. Take care to select the appropriate box on the AFRI Project Type form when submitting the grant application.

I qualify as a New Investigator, but my co-PDs do not. Can my application still be considered as a New Investigator grant?

Yes, only the lead Project Director must qualify as a New Investigator.

New Investigator Grant applications do not need to adhere to the eligibility requirements described for Strengthening Grants unless they are applying under both grant types.

How do I calculate how long I have been in a “career-track position”? What is a career-track position? Does receiving federal funding as a Co-PD make me ineligible to be a New Investigator?

To calculate your time in your initial career-track position, you should use the application deadline for the Program Area Priority that you are applying to. This period must be five years or less in order to qualify as a New Investigator. For example:

- Began career-track position October 2020; Program Deadline September 2025. **Qualifies** (*not greater than five years*).
- Began career-track position June 2020; Program Deadline September 2025. **Does NOT Qualify** (*greater than five years*).

A **career-track position** is one in which the applicant’s institution allows the individual to submit an application (beyond a fellowship grant application) as Project Director (PD). It may be a position that is potentially a permanent position, such as a tenure-track position or, for government jobs, “career” or “career conditional” appointment. Time in a postdoctoral training position does not count toward the first five years in a career-track position. However, if the applicant has been highly successful prior to their initial career-track appointment, and has an extensive publication record, then they would not qualify as a New Investigator.

If a Project Director has less than five years in their initial career-track position and has received federal funding as a Co-PD on a grant, they still qualify as a New Investigator. Only federal research funding received as PD on a grant disqualifies the applicant from being considered a New Investigator, with the exception of pre- or post-doctoral grants and AFRI Seed Grants. If a PD has received an AFRI seed grant, they

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may still be eligible to apply for a New Investigator Standard Grant. Federal funding received by the applicant as Co-PD of previously awarded competitive grants does not count against New Investigator eligibility.

I previously received an AFRI Strengthening Seed Grant. Am I eligible to submit another Seed Grant as a New Investigator?

No, you may not apply for another seed grant as a New Investigator. However, if you are at a strengthening-eligible institution, then you may submit another Strengthening Seed Grant application. You are also eligible to submit a New Investigator Standard Grant application.

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